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To build a place requires the
construction of agreements:

about where to build,
how to build, what to build,
about neighboring,
sequestering, nurturing,
about resources and
the expenditure of effort,
about limits,
about imagined results.

Place is inherently participatory.

To design a place involves the interests of many. Constructing agreements becomes a major part of the task — absorbing attention — demanding resolution, often taxing the limits of effort, ingenuity and patience.

Even to recognize a place involves the melding of physical conditions, personal observations and socially constructed meanings. To maintain, adjust and renew places so that they will remain important to the people who use them requires creating a pattern of engagement, of caring.

To become part of a place is to become part of a process. The place of community is constantly changing; the structure of relationships between people, things and ideas that makes physical settings effective must frequently be reconstructed. Both processes and forms can attract and focus community imagination; successful designers of place fuse the two.

This issue on participation was framed as an extension of Randy Hester's call for examining the ways in which the idea of participation in design, once seen as an avenue for the creation of opportunity, has often dissipated or been co-opted into paths of obstruction, confusion and neglect. Participation, to be effective in the construction of places, must be directed and energetic; it must be infused with strong and effective ideas about design possibility and the

willingness to engage, rather than to avoid, conflicting views. It requires real engagement in the design issues at hand; it cannot be reduced to the routine processing of information or a means of venting community frustration.

The issue includes provocative and thoughtful articles by Hester and Mark Francis, and a series of case studies that suggest the diversity of successful practices. There are also interviews with two people, Larry Halprin and Ron Shiffman, who have long, inventive and successful experience in the conduct of design and community processes that help people take part in understanding and shaping places.

The parts of the common realm can be conceived many ways, and they belong to many people. Designing, building and maintaining a commonwealth of spaces that can be shared that will become home to the life of the community means taking part in, not taking a part of, the places we inhabit.

—Donlyn Lyndon